

Information literacy skills for sustainable development goals in the 21st Century Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper examines Information Literacy Skills (ILS) for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the 21st Century Nigeria. It presents information as an essential commodity needed by every member of the society regardless of age, gender, educational level, occupation or race. The paper explains the relationship between ILS and education on one hand and education and SDGs on the other. It further lists the seventeen (17) goals by the United Nations with emphasis on goal number four (4); quality education which is the core of Librarianship. The activities of the Nigerian Government in creating awareness through such organisations as National Orientation Agency (NOA), National Library and the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) for SDGs were discussed. The paper concludes by stating IL as forming the basis for a lifelong learning, encouraging critical thinking for SDGs. The paper further recommends among others that, quality education should be encouraged for all for sustainable development to be achieved. Tertiary institutions should also ensure that ILS is imparted into every student through library orientation and instruction. Use of Library should be made a core course and part of the curriculum at the tertiary institutions.

Key words: Education, Information Literacy Skills, Sustainable Development Goals.

Introduction

Information is an essential commodity necessary for a meaningful development; it is the key that unlocks the door of development. To be informed is to be knowledgeable, it is to possess or show a great deal of awareness or intelligence. Information is a word that different people have interpreted to mean different things. An engineer views it as the transmission over communication; philosophers see it as recorded fact with the content of the text or with the experience stored on the human mind. To the common man, it consists of stories and news he hears every time and every day from people around him. Information is a commodity that everyone in society cannot do without due to its importance in human day to day activities. Kemp (1976) observes that, information has been called, the fifth need of man, ranking after air, water, food, and shelter. It can be described as the core foundation for planning, directing, and controlling any enterprise.

According to Issa, Amusan, Rabiun and Ojokuku (2016), information products are packaged using different media including oral, written or multimedia, which are transmitted or disseminated to end users through necessary channels. For instance, oral information is through families, neighbours and radio; while written/documented one is disseminated through books, pamphlets, manuals, while posters and multimedia information products are mostly disseminated through television, Internet, films, and documentaries. This ensures the people get access to information in different media as packaged and presented to suit all categories of users without any format or barrier. Those who do not have access to the internet can access the print form. Those who prefer to listen to information being read out could equally benefit.

However, through the emergence and rapid increase of information and communication technologies (ICTs), which in effect is redesigning the information environment of individuals in the society, libraries are good sources of information especially for students and other categories of people. ICTs also enable easy access to information as well as facilitate online sharing, communication and collaborations among users across the universe. As such, the information environment is now interwoven, networked, interactive, diverse and unpredictable because it is constantly changing, thereby evolving in terms of availability and varieties of media as well as information sources (Andretta, 2005). As a result, the provision of information by the librarians is no longer constrained by time and place; many libraries can now provide online information services to meet their users' information needs any time anywhere.

Literacy Skills

Literacy skills are the skills needed for reading and writing, awareness of print, and the relationship between letters and sounds. These skills help students acquire knowledge through reading and in the use of media and technology.

Types of literacy skills for sustainable development

For a sustainable development, there are important skills to possess and they include the following:

1. **Alphabetical literacy.** This is the ability to write.
2. **Functional literacy.** The ability to read and write.
3. **Social literacy.** This has to do with the ability to communicate in a cultural context.
4. **Information literacy.** This involves the ability to locate, evaluate and use information.

5. **Digital literacy.** This is the ability to apply information literacy skill in digital environment.

For information to be maximally utilized, there is the need for information literacy skills to be developed in individuals which will in turn result in productivity leading to sustainable development. Most importantly, librarians need to acquire information skills to be able to pass them on to the users through users' education, library orientation/instruction and bibliographical instruction. This will enable them become independent and lifelong learners, by this they can positively affect the society for sustainable development. An information literate individual will be a valuable and indispensable asset in achieving sustainable development.

Through review of available literature, this paper attempts to:

- (i) Examine the concept of information literacy skills;
- (ii) Determine relationship between information literacy skills and education;
- (iii) Describe the concept of sustainable development;
- (iv) Examine the role of education in sustainable development;
- (v) Determine the links between information literacy skill and education as well as with sustainable development;
- (vi) Examine the role of Information Literacy Skills in Sustainable Development Goals in the 21st Century Nigeria.

Concept of information literacy skills

Fagbohun (2016) stated that, information literacy is about peoples' ability to operate effectively in an information environment. The United States National Forum on Information Literacy (2009) has described information literacy as the ability to know when there is need for information, to be able to identify, locate, evaluate, and effectively use that information to solve an issue or problem at hand. The American Library Association (2004) also defines information literacy as a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information. In the same vein Tella (2015) describes information literacy competence as the ability of an individual to identify information needs, seek out resources to meet those needs, and then analyze, evaluate, synthesize, and communicate the resultant knowledge. It is a core instructional pedagogy in education, and most importantly at tertiary level due to diverse information sources and formats, such as print-based materials, learning videos, library databases, educational web sites, and other sources.

Information literacy competences are therefore, aggregate of various skills and abilities encompassing library-use, literacy, computer literacy, media literacy, network literacy, critical thinking skills, information-use ethics, and communication skills, which when acquired, would empower students not only to be successful in their academic pursuits and become independent lifelong learners, but also as potential successful practitioners in various sectors of the economy. In other, words certain key words are vital in information literacy; that is, knowledge, locate, evaluate and use. Considering the importance of information in everyday activities of all categories of people, it then behoves on individuals to be information literate so as to be able to contribute meaningfully to national development and sustainability. Therefore, there is need for information literacy skills for individuals in the society. There is a link between

information literacy skills and education on one side and education and development on the other side.

Effects of information literacy skills on education

Information literacy is a vital component of educational process at all levels. Stressing that information literacy is a key focus of educational institutions at all levels and institutions are involved in inculcating into learners, the obligation of lifelong learning ability so as to uphold this standard and as well come up with innovations that can be needed to keep pace with or outpace changes. This has brought about the need for the institutions of learning to adopt educational methods that can facilitate and enhance students' ability to harness the power of information as a result of our increasingly information-centric society. These abilities include being able to evaluate information, ascertain among other things its relevance, authenticity and modernity. These are very key and essential in life and also form the basis for a lifelong learning.

To achieve this important feat, Miller, Chabot and Messina (2009) pointed out that information literacy instruction in higher education can take any of these varieties of forms: stand-alone courses or classes; online tutorials; workbooks; course-related instruction; or course-integrated instruction. All these provide the learner with the ability to think critically. Critical thinking is an important educational outcome for students. It helps to enhance information evaluation and information literacy among students through the practice of formal argumentation like debates and formal presentations to analyze and critically evaluate information to distinguish between fact and opinion. Being able to think critically during the school age prepares young people during their period of formal education for the future to be useful in national development and its sustainability. It could equip them with the skills they need to understand the political system and their place within it through problem solving and resource-based learning.

Consequently, by acquiring information competence, students can multiply their learning chances and opportunities by using various information sources to expand their knowledge base, ask informed questions, and sharpen their critical thinking skills for further self-development (ACRL, 2000). A very strong connection exists between education and the job market. The employable youths who possess information literacy skills are products of educational institutions and they are those who acquire skills crucial in securing comfortable employment. These are essential tools used positively for the development of human capital and national development which is what job or labour market entails. According to Ebong and Asodike (2012), human capital therefore is an important ingredient necessary for national development as well as its sustainability. The skills learnt in the school are put into practice in the job market which presents a reflection on sustainable development. Bernard, Ernest, George, Rogerson and Jack (2014) opined that most developed countries of the world are developed because their higher institutions are able to provide technical and technological training to a greater part of their citizens. That those institutions are basically designed to address employment and human resource capacity challenges. These are wheels for the vehicle of sustainable development

The concept of sustainable development

Development is that event or incidence that causes a situation to change or progress. In other words, progressive movement from one stage to another is known as development.

Sustainability can be defined as the practice of maintaining processes of productivity indefinitely. These processes could either be natural or human made and they require replacing resources used with resources of equal or greater value without degrading or endangering natural biotic systems. Nigeria is not left out in the global move by the United Nations for sustainable development goals.

Akintayo (2016) defined sustainable development as development that meets the needs of today without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs. This has to do with not just satisfying today's needs but having long term plans for maintaining the satisfaction of needs at all times. This involves managing the growth in world's economics such that disaster both natural and manmade will be avoided and as well bridge the gap that exists between the rich and the poor. Of course, this could be achievable through the conscious and joint efforts of all the citizenry, it involves that all play their parts globally, national, and at local levels.

Sustainable development has to do with the organizing principle for meeting human development goals while at the same time sustaining the ability of natural systems to provide the natural resources and ecosystem services upon which the economy and society depend. This will give birth to desirable state of society where standard of living and conditions and resource use continue to meet human needs without jeopardizing the integrity and stability of the natural systems. It is a situation whereby people's well-being is taken into consideration using every resource; man made and natural for continuity and for the benefit of the masses in a way that the ecological system is replenished for lives sustainability. Sustainable development takes into consideration the social, political, and economic challenges faced by humanity. It measures them up with natural resources available for proper management to cushion or terminate the effects of those challenges.

Information literacy skills (ILS), education and sustainable development goals

Information literacy skills, education and development have very strong links, as one leads to the other. Education is central due to its importance in achieving information literacy skill and also crucial in attaining sustainable development. ILS helps the educated to impart on the society by creating the awareness of education as a fundamental human right which will help reduce learning crisis. In the same vein education empowers people to acquire skills, knowledge, values and attitudes necessary to secure the basic socio-economic needs crucial for sustainable development of their societies.

Information Literacy Skills ↔ Education ↔ Development

United Nations Millennium Development Goals

The United Nations through many of its agencies is involved in activities that can bring about development in developing countries and as well sustain the development. United Nations came up with eight millennium development goals in September 2000 with a commitment and expectation for attainment to be accomplished in fifteen (15) years, that is, by 2015. Other activities and programmes are still put in place by the body towards SDGs.

The eight millennium development goals are to:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger;

2. Achieve universal primary education;
3. Promote gender equality and empower women;
4. Reduce child mortality;
5. Improve maternal health;
6. Combat HIV/AIDS and other diseases;
7. Ensure environmental sustainability; and
8. Develop a global partnership for development.

UNDP is helping countries to simultaneously reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development that can lead to transformational change, bringing about real improvements in people's lives. Also promoting an integrated approach to achieve sustainable development that tackles the connected issues of multidimensional poverty, inequality, exclusion, and sustainability, while enhancing knowledge, skills and production technologies to reduce risks and sustain development gains. Countries build their capacity to integrate environmental considerations into development plans and strategies, including through managing and sustainably using natural resources; ensuring that natural wealth is used to improve people's lives. Also, promoting economic recovery and livelihoods, and better targeting policies and social protection for those in need. The goal of the United Nations is to strengthen capabilities and opportunities to reduce poverty and marginalization and focus on most vulnerable groups such that economic, social and environmental issues would be addressed.

In September 2015, 193 world leaders came up with 17 Global Goals for Sustainable Development. The soul aim of the meeting was to put an end to extreme poverty, inequality and climate change by 2030.

The goals

1. No poverty
2. Zero hunger
3. Good health and well being
4. Quality education
5. Gender equality
6. Clean water and sanitation
7. Affordable and clean energy
8. Decent work and economic growth
9. Industrial innovation and infrastructure
10. Reduced inequalities
11. Sustainable cities and communities
12. Responsible consumption and production
13. Climate action
14. Life below water
15. Life on land
16. Peace and justice strong industries
17. Partnership for the goals

Goal number four (4) is the main focus in this paper as it plays vital role in sustainable development.



Role of education in sustainable development goals

Education is a key player in development at all levels, as such no meaningful development can be attained without quality education. At global level, UNESCO is involved in the campaign for education for all through Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). UNESCO stated that ESD empowers people to change the way they think and work towards a sustainable future. It equally enables members of the societies learn to live together peaceably towards sustainable development with a realization of the fact that whatever is done today can have implications on the lives of people and the planet in future. Therefore, it is expected that individuals and societies need to learn to live together sustainably and take action responsibly based on mutual understanding. Education therefore helps people to develop knowledge, skills, values and behaviours needed for sustainable development. Quality education is a key enabler for sustainable development, therefore the goal is of paramount importance to librarians because libraries are established mostly for the literates.

Role of information literacy skills in sustainable development goals in the 21st Century Nigeria

Nigeria as a developing country is on its toes in achieving sustainable development as every move is geared towards United Nations SDGs especially in the areas of education and information literacy skills. Nigerian Government through organisations such as the National Orientation Agency, National Library, and Nigerian Library Association to create awareness on ILS. All these are agents involved in creating the awareness and passing the necessary skills to users. It is believed that these concerted efforts by the Federal Government of Nigeria will foster the development of independent, self-sufficient learning.

Conclusion

The role of information literacy skills in sustainable development goals in the 21st Century Nigeria cannot be over emphasized because, it enables people to think critically for sustainable development. The strong link binding information literacy skills and education on one side and education and sustainable development on the other side cannot be severed, they all work hand in hand. The library on its side plays significant role as an active player on both sides through the provision of information materials as well as passing the knowledge on to those who will in turn impart the society for sustainable development. ILS is impossible without education while sustainable development is unachievable without education; this is where the library comes to play. Libraries are good sources of information especially for students and other categories of people.

Recommendations

1. Quality education should be encouraged for all for sustainable development to be achieved.
2. Tertiary institutions should ensure that information literacy skills are imparted into every student through library orientation and instruction.
3. Use of library or Library Instruction Programme should be made a core course and part of the curriculum at the tertiary institutions.
4. Librarians should develop themselves in information literacy skills so as to effectively impart those who will in turn impart the society for sustainable development

5. Nigerian Government should support the seventeen goals agenda by creating more avenues for the awareness of sustainable development goals.
6. All hands should be on deck and every one should be involved in the move for a sustainable development in the country.

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